

out of the great dark swamp of misery I've pulled you into, along with myself."

Nellie kissed his quivering lips to silence.

"Why," she cried, "where's the misery? Because we have to cut and trim pretty closely is the air any heavier or the golden sunlight any less bright? Does not the sweet, fresh cornmeal taste better than ever because there isn't so much of it, and the dear old house—it's our palace, we love it!"

"Say, exclaimed old Abner, perking up magically, "you're a household angel, you are! How you stand all my foolish speculations and the hard life I can't understand."

"You naughty fibber!" chided Nellie fondly. "Once there was a poor little orphan girl. The village had no use for her. A dear old man named Abner Post saved her from the poorhouse by adopting her. Hetaught her to read and write, he gave her a happy, happy life. And as she stands here today, she blesses him because he has given her love! love! love! Oh, never care for the dark days, dear—so many are bright. And besides—besides," she flushed and was embarrassed, "I think—I am sure things are going to mend."

The artless old man did not notice her confusion. Her cheering words alone impressed him and his soul was comforted.

Nellie had a fond cherished secret, but she did not reveal it to her adopted father. Had he been less self-centered he might have tried to find a cause for her more than happy face, her frequent lonely walks away from the old homestead evenings.

It was about two weeks later that Abner came into the house in a great state of excitement.

"Nellie, child, look there!" he exclaimed, and held up so queer an object that she was quite startled and puzzled. It was a squash, but such a squash! It was a perfect presentment, only in vegetable form, of one

of the glass forms that had cost the old man his spare capital.

"Just happened to notice that one of those thousand-and-one squash vines had run an end into one of those glass images, sprouting and filled it up. I broke the glass and there you are. I reckon never before has the world produced a genuine vegetable Chinese mandarin."

"But—but—" began Nellie.

"What of it?" jubilated the old man. "Why, I'm going to run a vine into every one of the old molds. Don't you see: Chinese gods: Hindoo divinities, distorted dwarfs, grotesque harlequins—why, Nellie, before fair time I'll have such a collection as will be the drawing card of the whole show! There are freak gatherers who will pay me a fortune for the display. See if I ain't right!"

Alas! for two months old Abner thought only of the culture of his odd squashes. He shipped them to the state fair and followed them in person.

Nellie met him at the train when he returned, a week later. Abner was slightly glum, for his freaks had excited only a passing notice and then were forgotten.

"Reckon I'm an unlucky speculator!" he laughed, Nellie's cheery smiles acting like a tonic on him. "All right, but try, try again! I'm going to pitch in to honest, humdrum, practical farming and give up my wild goose schemes."

"Home, father!" cried Nellie, as they reached the old homestead. "Jump down, dear."

But Abner only stared. The old place had a new look. The house had been painted, the fence mended, a new wing had been built onto the house.

"Why, Nellie!" gasped the old man in a dubious stupefied kind of a way. "And who's that—why, Paul Worthington!"

"Father," whispered Nellie in his ear and all athrill with love, "he is my husband!"